

Using CQA as a Roadmap for Improvement

Conducting a Self Assessment

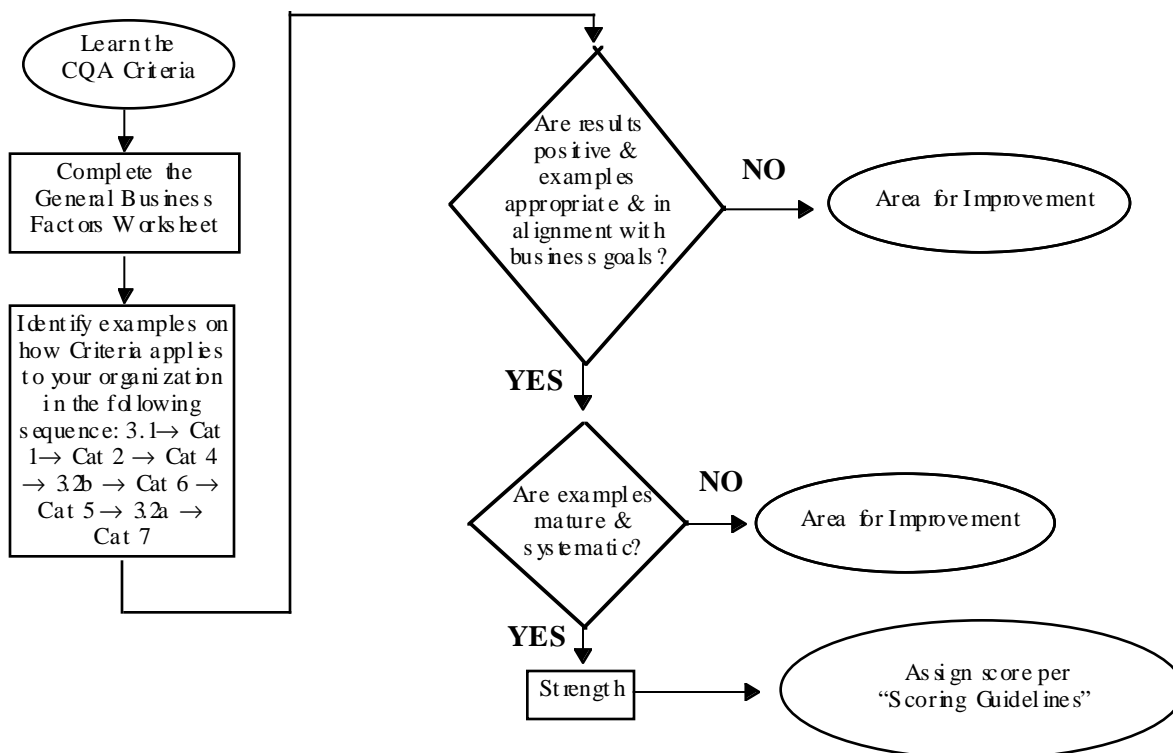
A self assessment is an opportunity to identify Strengths and Areas for Improvement. It's unnecessary to "plow too deeply" during the first-time self assessment, since plenty of areas for improvement will likely be identified.

There are several approaches to conducting a self assessment depending on many factors, such as:

- the stage of development of the continuous improvement process within your organization,
- type of organization,
- size of the organization, and
- mission requirements.

The assessment approach can range from an "armchair assessment," where a team brainstorms strengths and areas for improvements, to a full rigorous process where the organization trains examiners to write and score a detailed assessment report. For a first-time self assessment, conduct an "armchair" assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement by the senior management team. Make sure you use an experienced facilitator versed in the Criteria to help steer the team along!

The following flowchart shows a simplified approach to conducting a self assessment.



General Business Factors Worksheet

Organization/Command: _____ __ Staff only __ with field units

A. Organization's Mission(s):

•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

B. Work Force: Officers: _____ Enlisted: _____ Civilians: _____
 Reservists: _____ Auxiliaries: _____ Contracted: _____

C. Subordinate Commands: (if applicable)

•	•
•	•
•	•

D. Total Budget: \$ _____ \$ _____
 (AFC-4X Maintenance) (AFC-30 Operating)

\$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____
 (AFC-56 Training) (AFC-57 Medical) (other)

E. Key Customers (or customer groups) and their Customer Requirements:

Customer	Service/Product Provided	Customer Requirement
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•
•	•	•

F. Key Success Factors

•	•
•	•
•	•

G. Key Processes:

•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

H. Key Suppliers:

Supplier	Service/Product Supplied/Supplier Requirements
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	

I. Other factors pertinent to the applicant: (i.e., operating environment, regulatory requirements, special equipment, new missions)

**Assessment
Pitfalls**

The assessment process provides many more opportunities for improvement than you can tackle at any one time. Often it's said, "We did an assessment and nothing happened" or "We have already identified so many things to fix and we don't seem to be making progress." These statements highlight some of the pitfalls:

- Conducting an assessment as an exercise rather than a business activity to improve performance.
- Not tying the assessment to the strategic planning process.
- Not using the findings to generate process improvement.
- Not prioritizing the findings.
- Not involving the appropriate people in the organization to assure accurate findings and appropriate corrective actions.
- Focusing on the quality tools and techniques themselves rather than on the processes that those tools and techniques are supposed to improve.

It's easy to overload the system with too many areas for improvement. The assessment process usually generates many suggestions for improvement. The key is to categorize and prioritize the many areas for improvement to determine the critical few.

**Train in the
Criteria**

It's important that criteria and self assessment training be conducted before the criteria are applied for an in-depth assessment. Attempting to apply the criteria without first conducting training will likely result in false starts and wasted efforts.

**Training
Sources**

- The Leadership and Quality Institute
- Quality Performance Consultants
- LANTAREA Reserve Quality Team (RQT)
- American Society for Quality (ASQ)
- Association for Quality and Participation (AQP)
- State Quality Award organizations

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**Categorize
Gaps into
Project Areas**

For most units doing their first self assessment, the gaps will generally fall into the following project areas:

- Customer Requirements Definition
- Leadership System Development
- Strategic Planning Development
- Measures Development and Data Collection System
- Process Management and Improvement
- HR Development

Use the linkages in the Criteria to group related gaps together. For example, the measures selected in Item 4.1 are closely linked to the goals selected in Item 2.2. Note that the above project areas will include gaps across all the Categories due to the highly integrated nature of the Criteria.

**Develop Project
Plans**

Once the gaps are grouped into project areas, develop action plans to close the gaps. Avoid the pitfall of taking the gaps found by a single category assessment team (i.e. Category 1, 2,...7) and assigning gap-closing responsibility to a Category Owner. This almost always results in a fragmented improvement approach. The gaps found under one Category are closely related to those in another Category and therefore must be grouped together in a single project plan.

For large units, develop an overall CQA Criteria implementation plan, which includes how you will communicate your improvement efforts to the rest of the organization. The time spent in planning is well worth the effort and eliminates rework.

**Customer
Requirements**

- ☐ Segment customers into groups according to their needs or similarities.
 - ☐ Identify their specific needs by conducting interviews and focus group meetings. Translate these into Product and Service Quality requirements, with specific targets (standards) for each product and service.
 - ☐ For bigger units (more than 50 persons) identify a systematic methodology for identifying and updating customers and requirement on an ongoing basis.
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Leadership System

- ☐ Develop a method for providing credit and accountability to managers and employees for achieving targets for key indicators, such as linking OERs and Critical Job Elements to the goals and strategies of the organization.
 - ☐ Develop a way to measure how well senior leaders adhere to the values, and promote the vision and focus of the organization.
 - ☐ Establish the mission, vision and direction; define key success factors (i.e., those key strategies and things you must do in order to do an excellent job in serving your customers and to be an excellent unit). Note that your vision should be specific enough so your people know where you're going.
 - ☐ Develop a process by which senior managers review the performance of all key measures and take appropriate action.
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Strategic Planning

- ☐ Develop a strategic planning model and develop a strategic planning process that's right for you.
 - ☐ Once measures are identified in the project plans, develop long- and short-term specific targets for each measure and strategies to achieve these targets.
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Measures & Data Collection

- ☐ Develop a set of balanced measures (i.e., high-level measures at which the Commanding Officer and senior managers look) which are aligned with the Coast Guard's performance goals, Directorates Business Plans, and which link to your Vision, key processes, key business drivers, and unit's mission(s). Pick a few leading and lagging measures as appropriate in each of the following categories: Customer Satisfaction, Operational performance, Product/Service Quality, Human Resource Development, Effectiveness, Satisfaction and Well being, Supplier Quality, Corporate Citizenship, Financial Performance.
 - ☐ Develop a measurement plan which cascades the measures to all employees and managers. Note that this forms the foundation of your leadership system.
 - ☐ Develop a method for collecting, reporting and analyzing the data for the above measures.
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Process Management

- ☐ Identify and define all key business and support processes and their respective requirements (e.g., requirements, standards, measures, controlling strategies).
 - ☐ Identify how key processes will be measured to produce the Product/Service features, function and outcomes that are directly linked to Customer Requirements.
 - ☐ Develop a systematic approach for improving key processes.
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Human Resources

- ☐ Develop HR measures, goals, and strategies which correspond to and support the goals of the Strategic Plan and the mission(s) of the unit.
- ☐ Develop job designs which promote improved processes, and employee effectiveness, development and self direction.
- ☐ Conduct a Climate Survey to determine important morale and HR concerns. Develop plans to address these concerns and link successful execution of these plans to your leadership system.
- ☐ Develop an employee training needs assessment to determine what training is required to achieve HR goals and successfully execute HR strategies.

An Example

The following shows an example of a possible gap-closing Project Plan. Using this “project management” approach to closing gaps will help to correctly integrate, sequence, and coordinate performance improvement efforts.

Project Title	Customer Requirements Definition	Revised / /
Gaps Addressed	Identify customers/groups and ascertain their requirements	
Owners	LCDR I.M. Coastie, ENS A.J. Squaredaway, CWO Coffee, CPO Lighthouse, AM1 J. Flyby, BM3 I.M. Underway, Ms. Doright, Mr. I.C. Breaker.	
Project Steps		Schedule
1. Train in Customer Requirements Definition.		1. 1 March 97
2. ID and read top 1 - 2 books on Customer Requirements and Customer Sat. Measurement.		2. 1 March 97
3. Analyze existing customer sat. data - put in a format usable for this year's strategic planning process.		3. 1 March 97
4. Look at “M” Business Plan to see how they segmented customers.		4. 1 March 97
5. Develop a methodology and process for segmenting customers on an ongoing basis. Include updating the customer list in MASCOT.		5. 15 March 97
6. Develop a process for determining trends in customer satisfaction and trends in market changes.		6. 15 March 97
7. Develop a strategic plan workbook to summarize these trends.		7. _____
8. Develop a methodology and process for determining customer requirements on a systematic basis.		8. _____
9. Develop a process for determining future customer requirements.		9. 15 March 97
10. Develop a systematic process for inputting customer requirements into the strategic planning process.		10. _____
11. Develop a systematic process for translating customer requirements into product/service quality features, functions and outcomes.		11. _____
12. Develop a method/process for measuring customer satisfaction		12. _____
<i>The following are the deliverables of this project plan:</i>		
Deliverables		
1. Segmented List of Customers		
2. Process Documentation for Defining Customer Needs		
3. Process Documentation for Translating Customer Reqmts into Quality Reqmts		
4. Workbook to Capture Customer & Market Trends		
5. Document Customer Satisfaction Measure Process		

CQA Feedback Report

Comments from the CQA Feedback Report

When the CQA Feedback Report is received, it's important to not concentrate on the scores received, but on the comments under "Strengths" and "Areas for Improvement." As with any subjective report, there are "good" comments and "bad" comments. Don't let one bad comment discredit the whole report. One idea in the report which saves time and money in the long run for your organization, is worth some bad comments.

Read the Comment Summary first and look for Strengths and Areas for Improvement. Then read the individual comments under the Items and do a "reality check." There might be some weak comments – those which parrot the application ; and there might be some comments which you know are not true but the examiners were not able to decipher from the write up – make a note to paint a better picture next time for the examiners in that area but don't make that area a priority to address for improvement. There will be good comments which indicate gaps in approach and deployment that will be useful to you and your organization.

If the Approach and Deployment areas of the submission application have gaps, then the results section of the application and the written comments will indicate this also. Don't focus on the comments in the Results section if your approach and deployment sections have major gaps. Good results are a by-product of a sound approach and deployment systems.

For most organizations there will be many areas for improvement, large or small. Don't try to tackle them all at once. No organization, (Coast Guard, other government agency, outside business, etc.) has the resources to address all the areas for improvement. It then becomes a selection process to tackle the three to five which will yield the biggest "bang for your buck" to your organization over a selected period of time. **Again, don't focus on the scores; focus on the comments!**

Meaning of "--"

Comments in the Areas for Improvement will focus on: missing systems, a system which is not working, or a refinement to an existing system. Double minuses (--) in the feedback reports identify significant "Areas for Improvement." Refinement to existing systems usually do not merit double minuses. Non-existent or broken systems should receive double minuses (--).

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Next Steps

Gather all the major “Areas for Improvement” and prioritize them for corrective action. “Approach” areas for improvement should be addressed first (you can deploy a bad system, but it’s not worth the time or effort). For example, if Strategy Development Process (Category 2.1) and Company Strategy (Category 2.2) are both areas for improvement, it makes more sense to tackle the Strategy Development Process first, before tackling the Company Strategy. It’s important to understand the linkages and sequences in the system so you can fix the areas first which have impact down the line.

Prioritize the “Areas for Improvement” which have common themes throughout the package. Again, determine the critical few from the many. Don’t try to tackle too many at once or it will seem there is no progress being made on any of the areas and very few will probably get completed.

**Feedback
Report Action
Plan**

- ☐ Understand Criteria, Linkages, Sequences, and the Scoring Guidelines
 - ☐ Read Comment Summary
 - ☐ Read Item comments and do a “Reality Check” of the comments
 - ☐ Look for common themes (strengths and areas for improvement)
 - ☐ Look for areas/gaps where there is vast room for improvement
 - ☐ Prioritize “Approach” gaps
 - ☐ Prioritize “Deployment” gaps
 - ☐ Select the 3 to 5 gaps which will yield the most results
 - ☐ Assign sponsorship of the individual areas for improvement or Categories for improvement projects
 - ☐ Develop Action/Project Plans
 - ☐ Implement, monitor, and evaluate corrective action(s)
 - ☐ Submit CQA application again during the next cycle
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